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SUBJECT: TURKEY EVALUATING SARGSIAN'S INVITATION TO
PRESIDENT GUL; SEES HOT MONTHS AHEAD IN GEORGIA

REF: YEREVAN 536

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4 b,d

ARMENIAN INVITATION TO PRESIDENT GUL

11. (C) Turkey has received the written invitation to President Gul from Armenian President to attend the Turkey-Armenia World Cup qualification match in Yerevan, September 9 (reftel), according to MFA South Caucasus and Central Asia DDG Umit Yardim. Yardim told us that the invitation was received last week, transmitted via the Turkish Embassy in Tbilisi.

12. (C) Asked how Turkey intends to respond to the invitation, Yardim said it was difficult to say. Noting Turkey's domestic political uncertainties and regional volatility, two months, he said, "is a long time." But he said Turkey is evaluating the invitation. Emphasizing that his views are only personal, Yardim noted a sense of pessimism about the invitation. In Sargsian's presentations, Turkey continues to detect a link between opening the border and dialogue with Ankara. The Turks, he suggested, would have had an easier time accepting this invitation without any such linkages or pre-conditions, real or implied.

13. (C) Turkish-Armenian relations, he emphasized, are a complex set of elements, of which the border is only one. Opening the border does not capture all these elements (e.g., Nagorno-Karabakh or genocide recognition). Yardim also noted the incongruity between Sargsian's invitation and senior Armenian officials' pledge to redouble efforts to pursue international genocide recognition. He further noted that Turkey senses that Sargsian is under political pressure domestically and internationally, mentioning the potential for suspension of Armenia's Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly voting rights. (COMMENT: Absent diplomatic relations, Turkey has a limited perspective on Armenian domestic affairs which may lead it to conclude Sargsian's political staying power is more limited than it might actually be. END COMMENT.)

GEORGIA: HEIGHTENED TENSIONS PREDICTED

14. (C) Yardim restated Turkey's fence-sitting position on MAP: it will join any consensus that emerges in NATO on extending MAP to Georgia and Ukraine. The months leading up to the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in December, where a first assessment on the two countries' progress will be made, could see heightened tensions, Yardim surmised. Georgian President Saakashvili has accepted an invitation, along with Azerbaijani President Aliyev, to visit Kars, Turkey on July 26-27 for a ground-breaking ceremony on the Turkish leg of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. It is possible Saakashvili

will also travel to Ankara for consultations, Yardim said, but no such meetings have yet been planned.

15. (C) Turkey continues to believe that it can play a role in helping to open a window for Abkhazia to the West, Yardim said, for example by establishing direct transit between Sukhumi and Trabzon. All sides, he said, have been generally positive on the idea, but have objected to certain modalities. He said the GOT would welcome consultation with us on further exploring such ideas. Asked if Turkey has any views on who might be responsible for recent violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Yardim suggested all sides could be, and would not rule out Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatists, Russia or Georgian extremists.

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WILSON